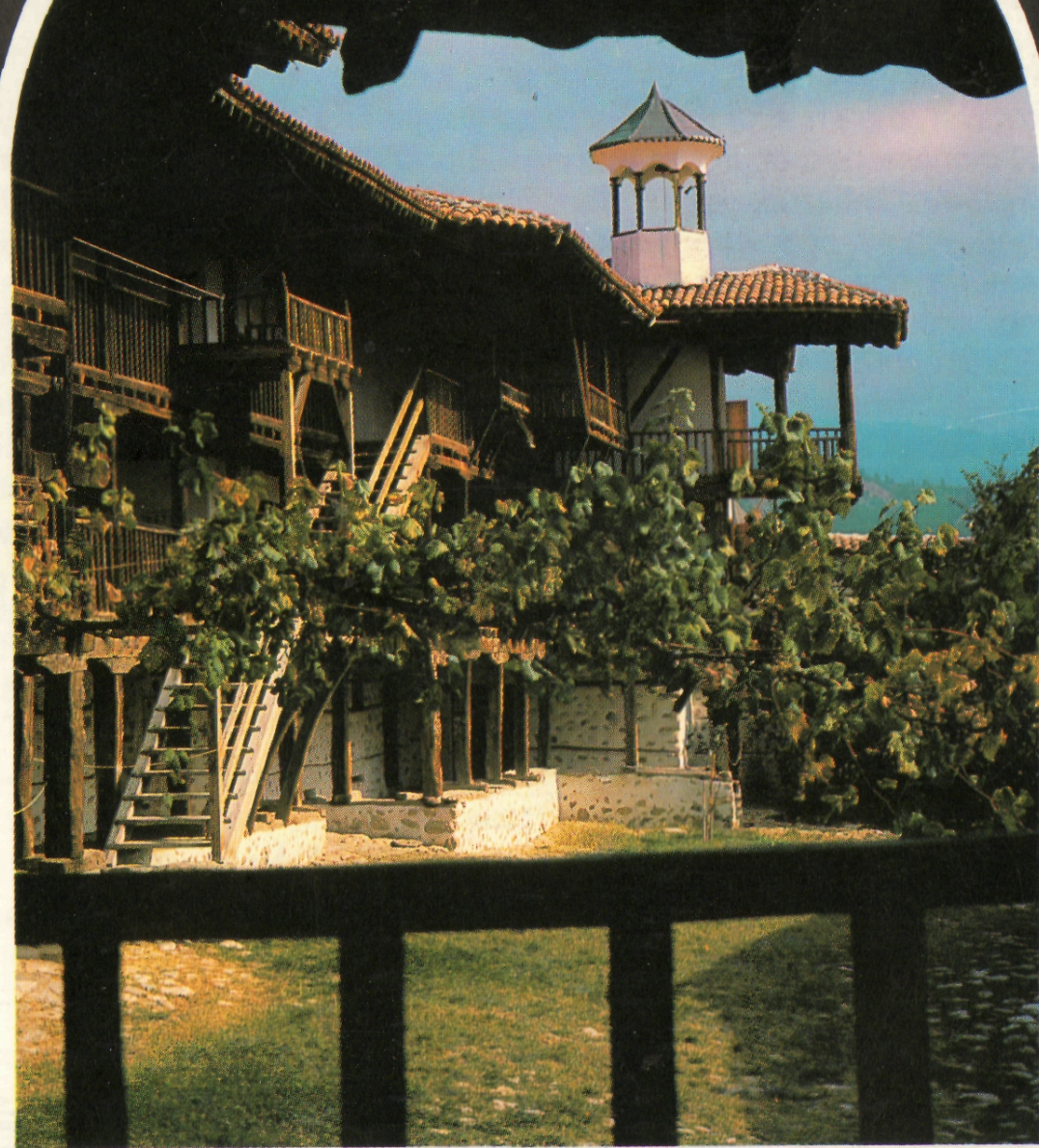


BULGARIAN

MONASTERIES



"NIKOLA FICHEV -
ZAHARI ZOGRAPH"
CHRISTIAN
ARCHITECTURE AND
ARTS FOUNDATION

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The monasteries, churches and convents are a wealth of inestimable value for the Bulgarian people. Being depositories of the Bulgarian spirit from the past, they treasure remarkable monuments of architecture and fine arts. Scores of mediaeval and Revival Period masters, builders and painters have created brilliant masterpieces of architecture in interaction with the fine arts. There are monasteries and churches whose cultural, historic and artistic values cannot be disputed even to this day and examples of this are the Rila and Bachkovo, Troyan and Preobrazhenie, Rozhen and Kapinovo monasteries, the Boyana Church and the Church of St Sophia in Sofia, the churches of the Forty Holy Martyrs and Sts Constantine and Elena in Veliko Turnovo, the Ivanovo Rock Churches, the Monastery of St George Zograph in Mount Athos, the Church of St Stephen in Istanbul.

However, the state of this invaluable wealth arouses alarm nowadays. More than 1000 monasteries, churches and convents are gradually crumbling to ruin. The "Nikola Fichev - Zahari Zograph" Christian Architecture and Arts Foundation was established with the sole purpose of protecting these unique historical and cultural monuments. It has set itself the task of stimulating various activities aimed at protecting, preserving and restoring to their original appearance the Bulgarian monasteries, churches and convents along with the construction of new ones; of aiding the establishment of scientific, designer's and executive groups to work on the restoration and preservation of the monasteries and churches; to contribute to the revival of the common spiritual and economic activities in the monasteries and churches; to propagate Christian architecture and arts through the mass media, through creative and publishing activities and informative trips.

The Foundation appeals to all believers, to cultural and religious organisations, to businessmen to join the movement for protection of Bulgarian architecture and arts. You could manifest your concern about it by making donations to the Foundation.



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Front cover: Rozhen Monastery - a view from the northern residential wing

Back cover: Rila Monastery - the church of the Holy Virgin. A wall-painting from the gallery.

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BULGARIAN MONASTERIES

When Christian monastic community emerged as a spiritual vanguard of the new Christian world, it was as early as the 4th - 5th century that monasteries began to be built in the Bulgarian lands. Written documents and archaeological excavations from that time testify to the existence of several dozens of monasteries raised on territories that would later be inhabited by Bulgarian people. The construction of the first monasteries followed a Near-East scheme that had already established itself in some places in Europe but as early as the 6th century Byzantine plans began gradually to make their influence felt only to turn later into a major standard of constructing Eastern Orthodox monasteries.

The adoption of Christianity as a state religion in 865 gave new scope to monastery building. The excavations in the old Bulgarian capitals of Pliska and Preslav are a convincing proof of the fact that it was in the monastery complexes that the new Christian culture in Bulgaria came into being. From the very beginning the monastic community was called upon to fight for the establishment of a coherent ethnic structure by joining the Proto-Bulgarian and Slav population to common rites and religious traditions thus creating and developing an all-Bulgarian culture.

After the adoption of Christianity in the second half of the 9th century the monasteries built near Pliska and Preslav and bearing similarities to the Byzantine ones, carried out, apart from their church-and-ritual functions, broad cultural, educational and economic activities. There appeared art studios for ceramic icons, scriptoria in which liturgical books were translated into Slavonic, new literary works were created, literary miscellanies were compiled which satisfied the necessity of propagating and consolidating the new religion. At that time the monasteries near Preslav gave shelter to such prominent men of letters as Konstantin of Preslav, Chernorizets Hrabr and Exarch Yosif who created works of extreme cultural and historical value thus marking the so-called Golden Age of Bulgarian literature.

However, the monasteries were not only literary, cultural and artistic centres. A large-scale construction was carried out there and in their environs. The ceramic, glass and sculptural workshops set up during the First Bulgarian Kingdom (9th-10th c.) were in the monastery complexes. At that time the architecture of Central and Western Europe was quite austere and dull while in the Byzantine Empire they were mostly interested in the architecture of inner spaces. In contrast to it Bulgarian architecture created dynamic silhouettes, broken - up colourful facades decorated with plastics. Despite the monastic asceticism the monastery buildings beam with their marvellous architecture - flexible and multi-coloured, an apotheosis of the organic merger and interaction of pagan traditions and achievements of the Christian culture. Later on, in the 10th-11th century, this pictorial style was adopted by Byzantine architecture and the architectural practices in Russia,

Serbia and other Orthodox states.

The creative activities carried out in the Preslav monasteries gave a strong impetus to the development of fine arts. In the 9th-10th century art studios were set up in some of the monasteries where they painted glazed ceramic icons and decorative canvases. The Preslav ceramic icons are not just unique pieces of the art of painting in the Balkan Peninsula; they are the earliest Slav icons ever to have been painted.

In the period between the 9th and the 12th century the monasteries and the churches were the centres which, during the Byzantine rule, managed to preserve the Bulgarian language, written culture, habits and national self-consciousness.

During the Second Bulgarian Kingdom the monastic communities in Bulgaria made good progress. In the 13th-14th century the construction of monasteries grew in scope. Ever more donations came from rulers and noblemen. The monasteries acquired wealth and a number of new churches, fortress towers, residential and farm buildings sprang up within their borders. The pictorial style in architecture reached new heights of perfection. It became an East-European analogue of the "burning Gothic style" of Western Europe. Striking examples of this are to be found in Nessebur, Veliko Turnovo, Cherven, Nikopol, Lovech, Ochrid, Kyustendil, Melnik.

During the Second Bulgarian Kingdom (13th-14th century) the churches and monasteries played particularly great role for recovering the past glory of the Bulgarian literature and arts. In the period between the late 12th - late 14th century the monasteries near the royal city of Veliko Turnovo which were supported by the Court, the Bulgarian patriarchy, the clerical and administrative aristocracy, turned into centres of most significant cultural and artistic undertakings.

In the 13th and 14th century scriptoria and art studios were set up in the Great Laura of the Forty Holy Martyrs, in the patriarchal monastery of the Trinity, in the Kilifarevo and Preobrazhenie monasteries where books were decorated, murals and icons were painted. The remains and the magnificent monumental decoration in the monastery churches of the Forty Holy Martyrs, of St Demetrius and in the old Preobrazhenie monastery, in the churches of Tsarevets and Trapezitsa, in the Ivanovo and Cherven rock monasteries illuminate the scope and high merits of the famous Turnovo school of painting. The ensembles of mural paintings in the mediaeval monasteries of Rila, Zemen and Bachkovo, remarkable for their high artistic value, have left a milestone along the road of Bulgaria's cultural progress. The Great Laura of the Forty Holy Martyrs, the Batoshevo and Zemen monasteries, the Boyana Church have preserved commemorative inscriptions of extreme historical significance for Bulgaria.

The fall of this country, in the late 14th century, to the Ottoman invaders could not withhold the Orthodox Church and its monasteries from carrying out their activities. Although most of the monasteries in the vicinity of the

capital city and other centres were destroyed, the spiritual efforts in these places never ceased. As early as the second half of the 15th century, in Western Bulgaria, simple yet marvellous ensembles of wall-paintings were created in the church of the "Holy Virgin Mary of Vitosha" in the Dragalevtsi Monastery (1476), the church of "St Demetrius" in the Boboshevo Monastery (1488), the church of "Sts Peter and Paul" in the Orlitsa convent of the Rila Monastery (1491); the murals in the church of "St George" in the Kremikovtsi Monastery (1493), etc. The creation of these artistic compositions was made possible thanks to the funds allotted by Bulgarian donors, local notables and clergymen. The commemorative and explanatory inscriptions accompanying the images are written in the Bulgarian language. The church plans and their ornamentation carried on the Bulgarian 13th - to-14th century architectural and artistic tradition.

The process of raising new churches and painting them with murals continued even in the 16th century. Examples of this are the Bigor, Kourilo, Ilentsi, Stroupetski, Podgoumerski, Trun, Malomalovo, etc. monasteries. Fascinating icon-paintings were created across the breadth of the country.

The traditions that had been established in the field of construction and fine arts were carried on in the 17th and the early 18th century. A number of buildings and monumental decorations which arouse interest today, go back to those days - the Karloukovo Monastery (1602), the Alino Monastery (1626), the Belino, Trun, Malomalovo and Bachkovo monasteries (1643), the Rozhen Monastery (1662), the Arbanassi Monastery, etc.

During the Ottoman domination (15th -19th century), and particularly during the period of the National Revival (18th-19th century), the monastic communities acquired a key role in Bulgaria's public life as the monasteries turned into animated socio-political and artistic centres and a field of spiritual and material expression of the reviving Bulgarian nation. Of great importance in those days were the Rila, Etropole and Dragalevtsi monasteries.

During the period of the National Revival (18th-19th century) the monasteries acquired ever greater independence as centres of culture and learning. Of particular importance was the role they played for the progress of enlightenment. Monastery schools were set up in many places which, like the one in the Rila Monastery, developed into big study circles. There the most cultured people were given an education and they later became teachers, clergymen, enlighteners. The monasteries treasure the sources of the Bulgarian people's history, the images of Bulgarian saints, commemorative inscriptions dedicated to Bulgarian rulers from the past. They are depositories of historical information, of artistic and language traditions.

During the National Revival not a few of the learned monks such as Zotik of Preobrazhenie, Neophit of Rila, Makari of Troyan, Yosiph Bradati, through their activities, called into being an atmosphere of creativity, of

national and patriotic feelings among the monastic community.

The period between the 13th and the 19th century witnessed the upswing of monastery construction throughout the country - in Moesia, Thrace and Macedonia. In the Sofia region alone the renovated monasteries numbered 70 or 80. The new buildings were constructed after the mediaeval building traditions; at the same time novelties were introduced mainly in the architectural detail and interior design. It was exactly in the 19th century that architecture, wood-carving, church- and decorative painting, artistic smithery and stone-cutting prospered and attained a peak development. And that was not accidental. Precisely at that time the Bulgarian nation reached one of the heights of its spiritual progress. The five-century-long Ottoman rule was overthrown and opportunities were held out, and a state of spiritual preparedness made itself felt for giving expression to one's creative abilities. During the period of the National Revival in Bulgaria considerable progress was made by the Rila and Bachkovo, Troyan and Preobrazhenie, Kilifarevo and Kapinovo, Arapovo and Ossenovlashko, Gorno Vodene and Rozhen monasteries and dozens of other monasteries, convents and cloisters.

The late 18th and the early 19th century witnessed an unprecedented revival of the art of wood-carving. It became the art form that was present everywhere - in the monasteries, in the cult and residential buildings. The woodcarved iconostases, pulpits, bishop's thrones, lavishly carved ceilings and pieces of furniture imparted solemnity and impressiveness to their interiors.

During the same period there also appeared significant works of the Bulgarian church monumental painting. The ornamentation of the main church and the chapels in the Rila Monastery as well as of the churches in the Troyan, Preobrazhenie, Kapinovo, Gornovodene, Lopoushanovo, Gornolozen and other monasteries is exceptional in scope and artistic merit, created by the most distinguished masters, representatives of the major arts centres in Bulgaria - Tryavna, Samokov and Bansko. It was through their artistry that the Bulgarian church painting came out from the standstill and freed itself from the dryness and rigidity that the canonical rules had imposed. The art of painting was already suffused with the vitality and spontaneity inbred in folklore, its bright colours responded to the high and optimistic ideals and the revived spirit of a nation.

Not a few of those educated in the monastery study circles took an active part in the revolutionary struggle for Bulgaria's liberation from the Ottoman oppressor along with the struggle they waged for the freedom of mind and religion.

The history and the artistic values of the Bulgarian monasteries are closely connected with the political, spiritual and cultural progress of the Bulgarian people. Therefore they must be treasured and handed down from one generation to another.

RILA MONASTERY was founded in the 10th century by the Bulgarian monk St John of Rila and was rebuilt in the 13th - 14th century. From that time are the fortress tower (1334), the bishop's throne, richly carved doors and some manuscripts, icon-paintings and church plates. In the 15th century, when Bulgaria fell to the Ottoman Turks, the monastery was abandoned for a short time but in the second half of the same century it was restored to a new life. Later it was for several times plundered and ravaged. Its thorough renovation began in the early 19th century. It was then that the residential wings and the church of the Holy Virgin were raised (1834-1837). The Rila Monastery has been listed as a world monument of culture. In it there is a well-appointed museum.

Rila Monastery - a general view





Rila Monastery - courtyard ensemble



Rila Monastery - the church of the Holy Virgin (1834-1837), gallery - west

Rila Monastery - the church of the Holy Virgin. A wall-painting depicting a scene from the Virgin's Akathist





Rila Monastery - the church of the Holy Virgin. A wall-painting in "The Dormition of St John of Rila" gallery

Rila Monastery - the church of the Holy Virgin. A wall-painting



Rila Monastery - a throne cross, miniature wood-carving by monk Raphael Rilets (1792-1802)



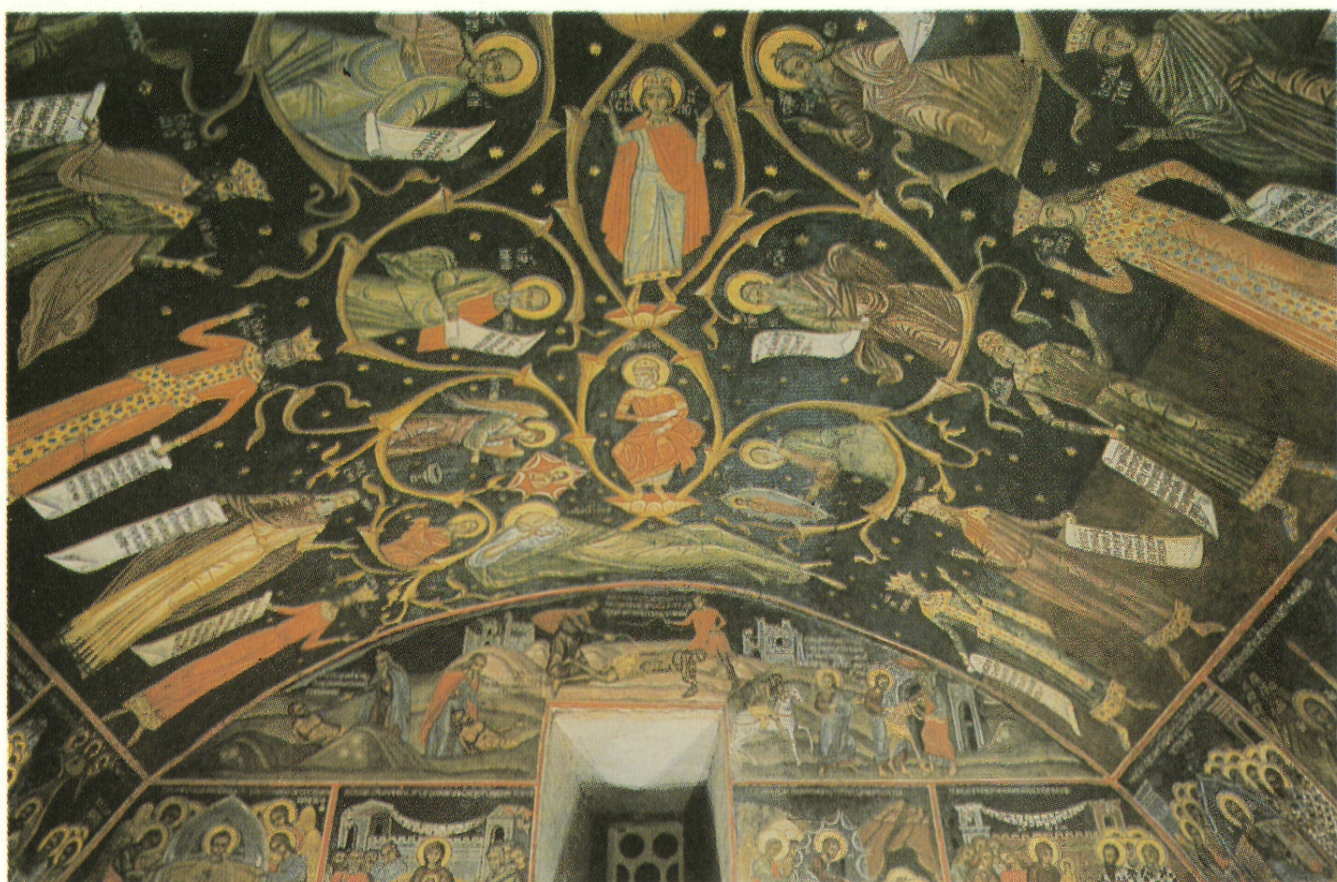
BACHKOVO MONASTERY was built in 1083 by Grigorii Bakuriani, a military in the Byzantine Empire, a Georgian by origin. From that time is the ossuary with its exquisite architecture and wall-paintings. The winter church of the Archangels dates in all likelihood to the 12th century. After 1344 tsar Ivan Alexander (1331-1371) raised several new buildings. In the early 16th century the monastery was destroyed by the Turkish conquerors to be restored in the late 16th century. Of great interest are the monastery refectory (1601), the big domed kitchen, the church of the Assumption (1604) with murals dating from 1643, the domed church of St Nicholas (1837) decorated in 1840 by the Revival Period painter Zahari Zograph.



Bachkovo Monastery - a general view



Bachkovo Monastery - the church of the Holy Virgin, the narthex. Portrait of the donor Georgi and his son (1643)



Bachkovo Monastery - the refectory. "The Tree of Isaiah" - a wall-painting (1643)

Bachkovo Monastery - the church of the Holy Virgin



THE ZOGRAPH MONASTERY OF "ST GEORGE" in Mount Athos is a Bulgarian monastery built in 919. On 10 October 1275 it was set on fire and 26 people were burnt alive in its fortress tower. Not a few Bulgarian rulers had repeatedly made donations to the monastery. For years on end there lived eminent personalities from the Bulgarian history. A great number of the monastery buildings date back to the 17th-19th century but certainly there are older buildings, too. The main church was erected in 1801 and painted in 1817. The buildings of the monastery port are from the 15th-19th century. The library treasures valuable 13th-18th century manuscripts. The monastery has also preserved many works of the art of church painting, wood-carving and jewelry.





The Zograph Monastery in Mount Athos - a view from the west

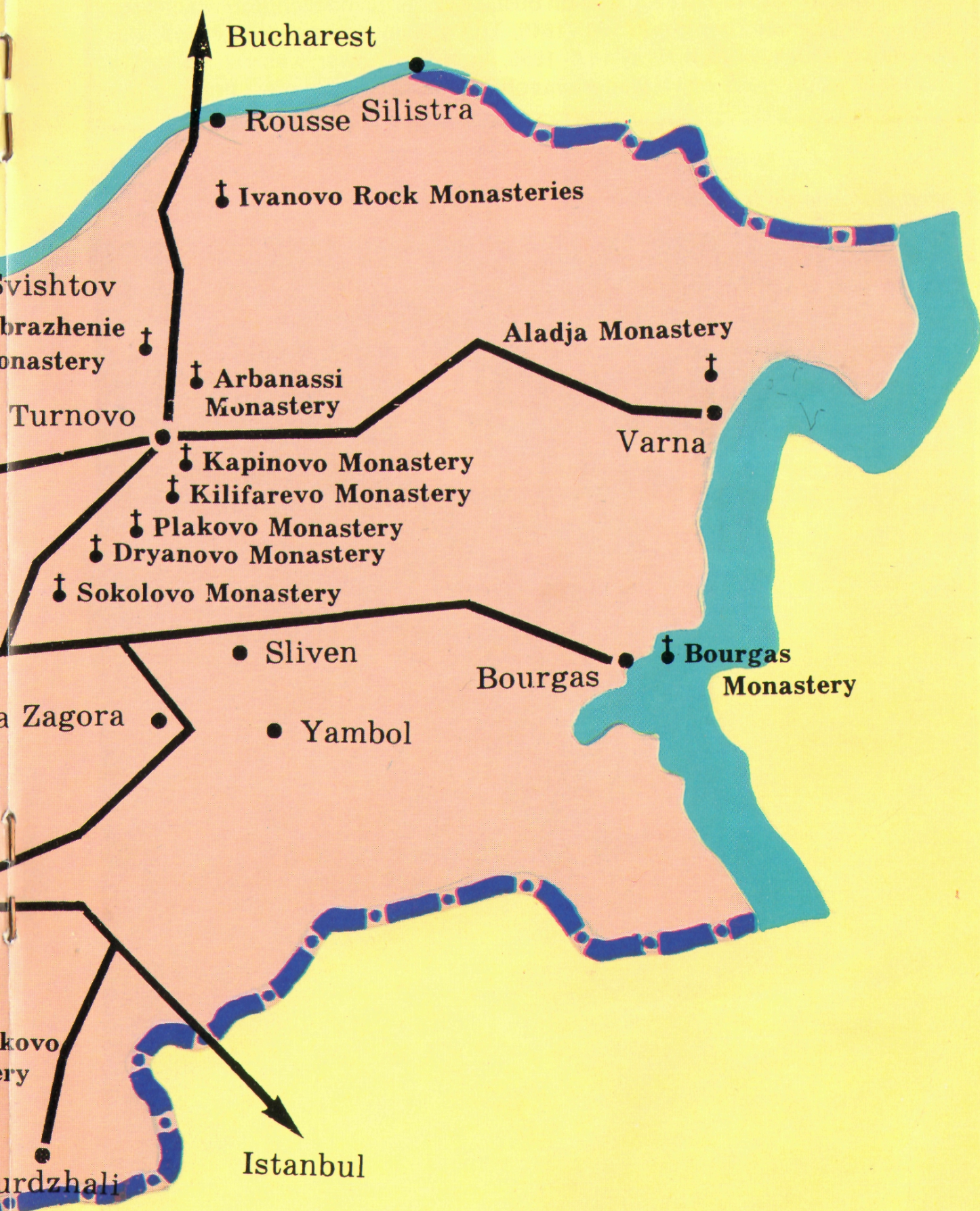
The Zograph Monastery in Mount Athos - the church of St George, a woodcarved iconostasis from the 19th century



◀ *The Zograph Monastery in Mount Athos. "St George Zograph" - an icon from the 14th century*

Map of Bulgaria with famous cities and monasteries





Legend has it that the foundation of the **PREOBRAZHENIE MONASTERY** dates back to the reign of tsar Ivan Alexander (1331-1371). South of it there are remains from a mediaeval monastery. During the Ottoman rule the monastery was abandoned till 1825 when hieromonk Zossim (Zotik) settled there from the Rila Monastery and got down to work on its restoration. The main church built in 1834 by master Dimiter Sofialiyata was completed by Nikola Fichev and painted by Zahari Zograph in 1849-1851. The residential wings were raised in 1834-1857 and the guest-room, started in 1834, was completed by Nikola Fichev along with the winter church of the Annunciation.

Preobrazhenie Monastery - the church of the Transfiguration (1835)





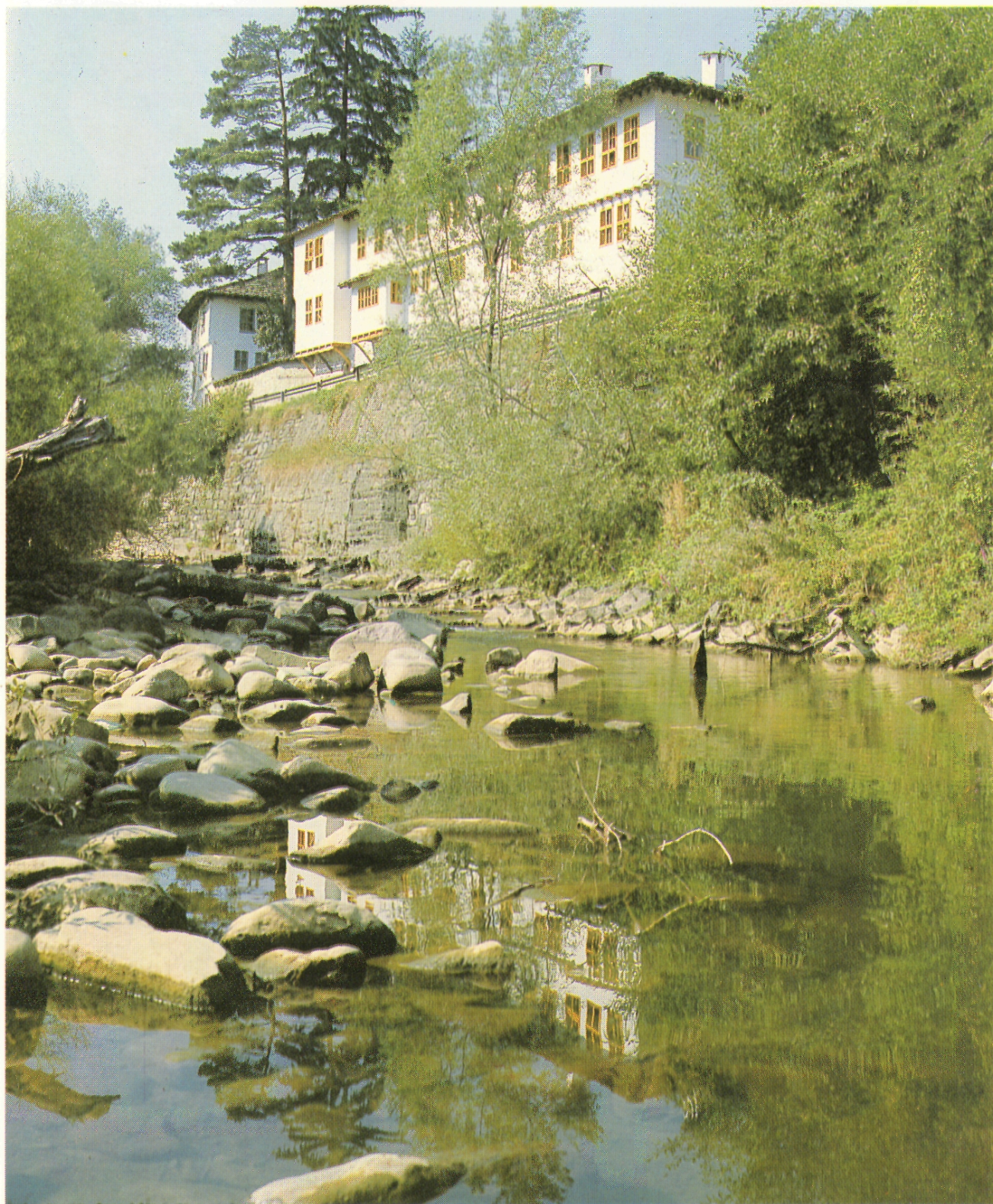
Preobrazhenie Monastery - "The Wheel of Life", a wall-painting by Zahari Zograph



Preobrazhenie Monastery - the church of the Transfiguration.
"Apocalypse" - detail from a wall-painting by Zahari Zograph

TROYAN MONASTERY must have been in existence long before the 15th century, as legends suggest. It flourished again about the year 1600. From the oldest church it is only the throne stone that has been preserved. Towards the beginning of the 19th century the monastic brotherhood re-erected the monastery. In 1835 master Konstantin built a wonderful main church which was painted by Zahari Zograph in 1847-1849. The spacious residential wings with roomy verandas were built in 1835-1855. In 1865 a tower was raised in the monastery courtyard with a winter church and a belfry on the last floor.

Troyan Monastery - a general view





Troyan Monastery - the church of the Holy Virgin. "The Day of Judgement" - detail from a wall-painting by Zahari Zograph



Troyan Monastery - the church of the Holy Virgin. Scenes from the "Apocalypse" - a wall-painting by Zahari Zograph in the gallery

Troyan Monastery - a wall-painting in the narthex of the main church of St Gleb of Russia by Zahari Zograph



DRYANOVO MONASTERY OF "ST ARCHANGEL MICHAEL" was founded in the 12th century and is in close proximity to the summer residence of the Bulgarian rulers from the Assen dynasty. It was for several times destroyed during the Ottoman domination. In its present-day site the monastery exists since 1845. The main church was built in 1861. Almost ruined after the Ottoman Turks' invasion, the monastery buildings were restored in 1880. Next to the church is the ossuary raised in memory of the perished insurgents. In the monastery there is a museum collection with exhibits from all historical epochs including neolithic finds from a nearby cave.

Dryanovo Monastery - a view from the church belfry





Dryanovo Monastery - a general view



Dryanovo Monastery - "Christ the Almighty", an icon by master Simeon of Tryavna

SOKOLOVO MONASTERY was founded in 1832-1833 by archbishop Yosiph of Sokolovo and hieromonk Agapi. In 1834 the main church was built with the financial aid of donors from the villages of Etura and Nova Mahala. The residential wings were consecutively erected between 1836 and the late 19th century. Of greatest interest is the guest-room with the gateway dating from 1836. The ossuary and the adjacent plastic fence were raised in 1860. The monastery fountain with falcons chiselled out in the corners goes back to 1868. A fire burnt the western wing of the monastery but it was restored in 1981-1982.



Sokolovo Monastery - a general view



Sokolovo Monastery - the church of the Assumption, the narthex. "Deesis" - a wall-painting



Sokolovo Monastery -
the narthex of the
church of the
Assumption. A wall-
painting from the 19th
century



Sokolovo Monastery -
the church of the
Assumption. A general
view

STS KYRIK AND YULITA MONASTERY was in all likelihood built before the 14th century. The earliest architectural monument in it is the fountain dating from 1696. Repeatedly set on fire by the Ottoman Turks, the monastery was restored to its present-day appearance after 1835. The main church was built about 1845 by Yugovo masters and was painted by Alexi Atanassov from Negoush in 1847-1850. The iconostasis and the church furniture are impressive pieces of skilful fretwork. The monastery treasures wonderful icon-paintings by Zahari Zograph and other Revival Period painters as well as silver and copper church plates of high artistic value.

Sts Kyrik and Yulita Monastery - an icon of the Virgin Life-Giving Source (1838)





Sts Kyrik and Yulita Monastery - the church in the monastery courtyard

Sts Kyrik and Yulita Monastery - an icon of St Demetrius on Horseback (1837)



Sts Kyrik and Yulita Monastery - an icon of Sts Kyrik and Yulita



Sts Kyrik and Yulita Monastery - an icon of St John the Baptist from the 19th century



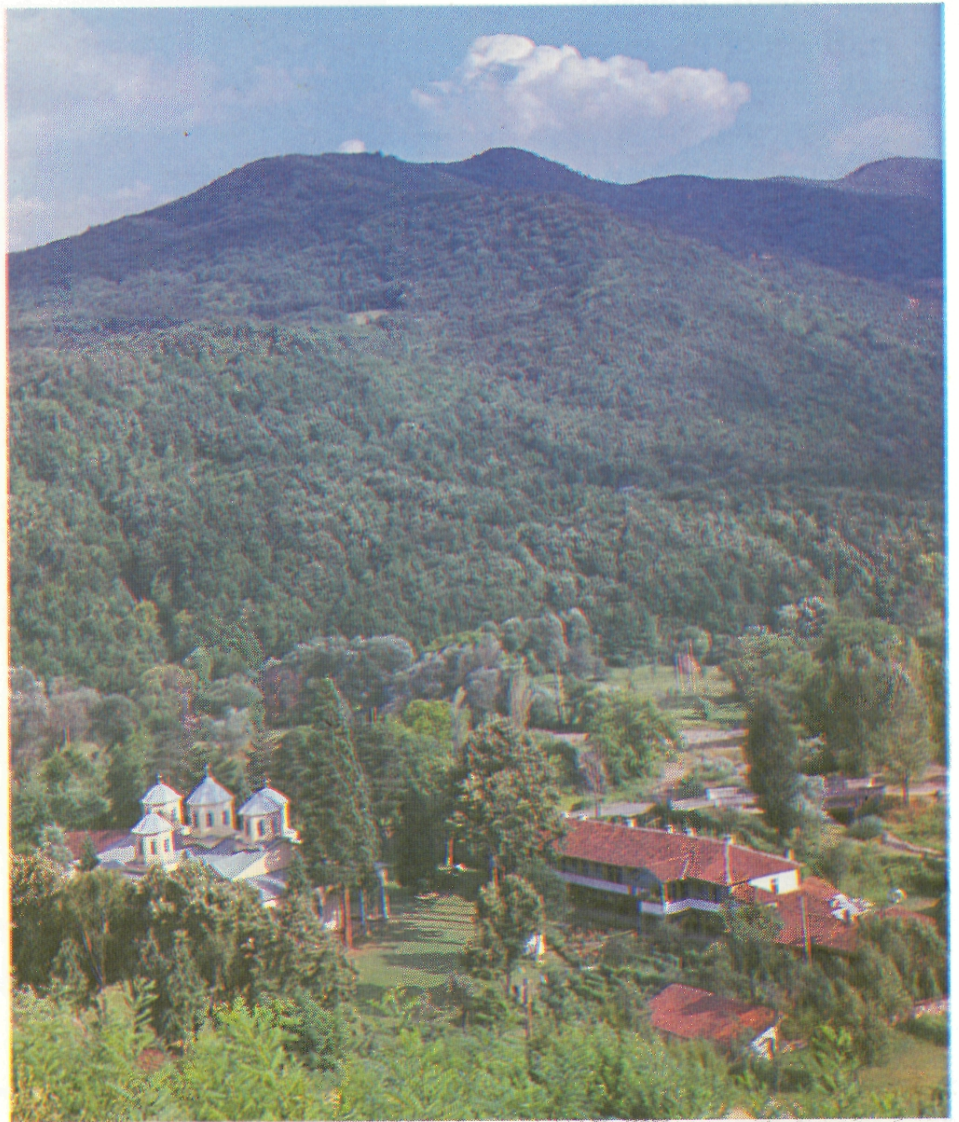
GLOZHENE MONASTERY - a silhouette



PLAKOVO MONASTERY - the main church of St Eliah and the tower built by master Nikola Fichev



LOPOUSHANOVO MONASTERY - a general view



KAPINOVO MONASTERY - a general view



СѦ ІРХІГ҃АЛЪ МИХАИЛЪ МВУНѢ АЗШВ БІТІАГО

